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**Letter from John Muir to [Robert Underwood] Johnson, 1899 Oct 8.**

John Muir

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Martinez, Oct 8, 1899

My dear Johnson--

Your letter of Sep. 21 came just a few days before Mr & Mrs Thompson & I enjoyed their visit very much because they have seen something. I still regret your not being on the Harriman trip. It was in every way just the thing for you--more so than for anyone on board. Still I'm glad you passed safely through the hot killing days of N. Y. with your family on Long Island.

I am pegging away at the park & forest Reservations which I hope to get off my hands before the close of the year--Then I'm going to write the Yosemite book I promised you. After which I mean to take up Alaska--first an account of my trip across the Muir Glacier that I promised you then a little book for Houghton Mifflin.

By the way a great many admirers of the dog story are urging me to have it brought out as a New Year's book for children. What do you think of the plan. If the Century Company cares to publish it I ll review it & send some illustrations--

I'm glad to hear Burroughs is going to give you his sparrow & impression of the N. wilderness--I cant help thinking they would have been better had he made the trip 35 or 40 yrs. ago. Still they will be novel & readable even at this late sundown date--He made us lots of fun on the trip--growled goodnaturedly all the way repeating over & over again J. B. what a fool you are coming on this blank frost business. He was subject to seasickness & when he got to Dutch Harbor 00nalaska propased to stay there until we returned from the Behring Sea trip. I urged him to come on & make the whole round icy excursion

07196



But as luck would have it the weather was stormy & while lying in his bunk half-sick he made rhymes to be posted in the smoking room--reflecting awful on me

& Behring Sea. Thus

"Snapping snarling Behring Sea,  
Hissing spitting as we flee--  
Spiteful Sea!

Where thou art's no clime for me;  
Climbing hills that sink & flee  
In to vales that bitterness be;  
Treacherous Sea!

Break thy fang for all of me--  
Shallow, foaming Behring Sea!  
Still our course is over thee;  
Full of anger, full of spite,  
Strong in luster, weak in might  
Draped in fog both day & night  
Barren Sea!

Only Murres abide with thee  
Had not John Muir put in his lip  
Thou hadst not found me in the ship.  
Groaning on my narrow bed,  
Heaping curses on thy head,  
Wishing he were instead.  
On green hills my foot would be  
Beyond the reach of Muir and thee.

Most everybody wrote this sort of dogerell except me. After I got home I

07196



got a long letter from the four big girls--Harrimans, Averill & Draper In  
reply to which I fell into doggerrell lik[e] the rest of the party--a copy of  
which I send you strictly for home private consumption--

The true Story of J. B. & Behring Sea

John B.

Burroughs he

Said he could never like Behring Sea

And said it most doleful

A whole rhyming soulful

Moaning it

Groaning it

Patheticallee!

It's big & its blue, he said

And has whales & a crew, he said

Of sea loins & seals

That splash merry reels

With queer ravings & wrangles--

Contortious, Contangles,

But its waves won't keep level,

They keep only mad revel,

And alas--my interior

Grows queerior queerior

The thing's shaking all over

And its kelp its not clover

And its seals & its whales

And its gulls & its gales

Care nothing whatever for Slabsides or me.

07196



So he lay down & howled it  
And shivered & growled it  
Flat & limp on a deck--chair  
With naught but his nose bare--  
Bemoaning & sighing  
"Come girls I am dying  
Quick tuck in my bluetoes  
All ten of 'em's true froze  
And shove grim Muir away.  
Shove him hard, girls I say  
To where his icebergs & glaciers & mad waters play.  
And while he is going  
Through this mad wind that's blowing  
Hit him some hardy whacks  
Choke him with Nunataks--  
For in all this bad sea  
There's nothing there's nothing that's too bad for he.

O Cornelia & Mary  
I've no comfort & nary  
A glimpse of my York state,  
Soon soon I'll be Shark bait--  
Dorothea & Betty dears  
Should it not draw some wetty tears  
That in all this cold water there's nothing for me  
But losses & crosses & blank misereee.

But soon a big seachange came over him,



No storm or wabbling wave now bores him  
Repentant, Sane, his Slabside days  
He spends in changing howls to praise.  
And thus he sings from dawn to dark  
As glad & blythe's a meadow lark.

"Home again from foreign climes  
Jingle Jangle merry chimes  
Amid my birds & trees & vines  
I fondly trace bright memory's lines.  
With heart & soul devout I stand  
Gazing on wild Alaska land.  
Its mountains clad in snow and ice  
Seem calm & pure as paradise--  
Kind Nature's love to them hath given  
The best of earth, the best of heaven.  
Their sculptured domes & peak's & towers  
Enwreathed in purple mist & flowers  
Rise range o'er range in song and rhyme  
Triumphant, wild, serene, sublime,  
Fountains of strength, of life, of motion,  
Guardians alike of land & ocean.

The purple tundras far extending  
Seen with the purple heavens blending  
The round unbounding nightless days  
Are filled with their Creators praise.  
Endless waters, endless woods

07196



Endless gardens endless floods  
Silvery fiords & balmy air  
Make endless beauty every where--  
New land's, new seas, new heavens, new earth--  
Day by Day I saw their birth.

Where all is beauty, all is love  
Through earth below to heaven above  
Enchanted, wondering, throbbing, glowing  
All the show on one flood flowing  
I scarce can make my memory bring  
From out the whole one separate thing  
Unless perhaps,--unless it be  
The broad effulgent Behring Sea--  
The brightest gem of all the bright North  
Reflecting every beauty right forth--

Its miles & leagues of purple dulses  
Still thrill & tingle all my pulses,  
Its gracious waves & breezes mild  
Still rock and fan me like a child  
Its flower--embroidered shores & bays  
Its wonderous skies, its nightless days  
Its teeming life, its bloom--clad islands  
Its far blue wavering lines of sky lands  
All rise before me now untroubled  
Their blessings--beauties more than doubled  
Therefore my proudest song must be

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The glories of great Behring Sea--

Ah me! poor doubting doleful sinner  
I feared its waves might spoil my dinner  
And had not H. & Muir insisted  
In faithless wreck I might have missed it  
I thought to stop at old Dutch Harbor  
Boarding with an old Dutch barber  
And, while the ship was gone go hunting  
The gold-crowned sparrow & snowflake bunting  
And thus I might have lost the whole  
My head, the sea, perhaps my soul  
Where dizzy cloud & fogs roll down  
On Oonalaska icy crown  
Making the famous wolves howl longer  
As they picked my bones to make them stronger

As now I view it o'er again  
It seem an awful might--have--been  
This dreadful fate Thank Heaven is passed  
For Muir most kindly held me fast  
And made me leave that old Dutch Harbor  
Give up the sparrows, give up the barber  
And stay aboard the ship & sail  
To Behring Sea with with [sic.] blissful gale--

If on that ship there was one angle  
Who brought for me a true evangel

07196



Both faith & reason I am sure  
Will say his name was just John Muir

And now wherein my lot is cast  
As long as life & memory last  
My grateful prayer to Heaven shall be  
God bless the Harrimans & he  
And every wave of Behring Sea--

Do you know Bliss? What sort of an editor is he likely to be  
Goodbye with kind regards to your family

John Muir

07196